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Attached is a story by Jeremiah O'Leary, writing in today's Star, quoting a "senior US intelligence official" as saying that the Cuban expeditionary forces in Africa have suffered an estimated 1,400 combat deaths in Angola and Ethiopia. A "conservative estimate" of total Cuban casualties is said to be 5,600.

1,400 Cubans Slain in African Combat, U.S. Intelligence Reports

By Jeremiah O'Leary
Washington Star Staff Writer

The Cuban expeditionary forces in Africa have suffered an estimated 1,400 combat deaths in the Angola and Ethiopia fighting over the past four years, according to a senior U.S. intelligence official.

He said the battle for Angola so far has cost the Cubans 1,000 fatalities, while the more recent fighting involving Ethiopia and Somalia has taken the lives of about 400 Cuban soldiers. In addition, the intelligence official said wounded and missing Cubans on all fronts add up to three or four times as many as those who were killed.

If these estimates by U.S. intelligence are correct, Fidel Castro is paying a heavy price for his African involvement. A conservative estimate of the total Cuban casualties in Africa is about 5,600 killed, wounded or missing.

IF LOSSES WERE to continue at this rate, one of every nine of the 40,000 Cuban troops serving in Africa could expect to become a casualty.

U.S. estimates disclosed yesterday are based on what is said to be reliable information from a variety of sources. It is the first time an American official has disclosed detailed figures on what Castro's African involvement is costing Cuba.

It has long been known that nearly a 10th of Cuba's armed forces is serving in Africa at any given time.

U.S. sources said it seemed that the magnitude of the casualties has not yet become apparent to the Cuban people, even though individual families know they have lost a son, brother or husband.

The casualty lists certainly have never been divulged to the Cuban people, officials said. Cuba's press, radio and television are totally controlled, and battle losses are not revealed.

Many of the wounded are treated overseas. Some of the dead have been buried in Africa, while the bodies of others are known to have been returned to Cuba for burial.

As a result, U.S. officials say, service in Africa is still popular and is considered an admirable patriotic act by the Cubans.

"It is not yet a Vietnam for them because they do not have a free press to tell them what is happening," an official said.

The present figure of 40,000 Cubans is the largest in the escalating Cuban presence there. The United States believes 16,000 and 17,000 Cubans are serving in Ethiopia while 20,000 remain in Angola involved with anti-Marxist forces, the South Africans and the Zaireans.

THE REST OF THE Cubans are scattered around 14 other African countries in small numbers as advisers and technicians. Castro publicly promised more than two years ago to reduce his forces in Africa. At that point only 27,000 Cubans were serving there.

Troopships have been seen bringing Cuban forces home, but the U.S. ascribes this to a rotation process of uncertain duration.

Cubans have been fighting in Africa since the Congo troubles of the early 1960s. Ernesto "Che" Guevara served a tour in the former Belgian Congo before raising an insurrection in Bolivia that cost him his life. Anti-Castro Cubans fought against Marxist Cubans in the confused beginnings of the Republic of Zaire when it was first granted independence by Belgium.

Under a 1974 law, the United States can undertake covert operations in foreign countries only if the president finds them "important to the national security" and so informs Congress.

The United States limits itself to minor military supply roles for friendly nations such as Zaire. The Cuban expeditionary force is largely supplied by the Soviet Union and is known to be operating under Soviet strategic control on the two primary battlefronts.